



**Health Department**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

October 17, 2002

***National Lead Poisoning Prevention Awareness Week, October 20 – 26, 2002***  
**Supporting Lead-safe Homes and Healthy Neighborhoods**

Milwaukee is moving forward in the battle to end childhood lead poisoning. In the past five years, rates of childhood lead poisoning have been cut in half, from 31.9% in 1997 to 16.0% in 2001. Collaboration and partnerships between the City of Milwaukee Health Department, community residents and advocates, property owners, legislators, financial institutions and the private sector are a big reason progress is being made.

Although the situation is improving, still nearly 1 out of 6 children tested for lead poisoning has enough lead in their body to do them harm. This is four times the national average of 4.4%. In some neighborhoods, where the housing is very old and in poor condition, prevalence rates for lead poisoning are greater than 50%. Lead still affects too many children in Milwaukee: in 2001, the total number of children in Milwaukee who were poisoned by lead was 4,022. Lead is particularly harmful to the developing brain and nervous system of fetuses, newborns and young children. The effects of even low level lead poisoning include: developmental delay, low IQ, hyperactivity, learning disabilities, behavioral problems, impaired hearing and stunted growth.

According to Amy Murphy, Division Manager of Home Environmental Health for the Milwaukee Health Department, "Lead poisoning is a solvable public health problem. It is a problem that is well-understood. We know that deteriorated window components are the main source of exposure in low-income rental properties. We have developed a research-based standard treatment for windows that protects children. We have programs to help owners make properties lead-safe, and support community education and advocacy. The last remaining gap in solving the childhood lead poisoning problem is assuring adequate resources to support lead hazard reduction activities." The Milwaukee Health Department's goal is the eradication of childhood lead poisoning as a major childhood disease by the year 2010.

While permanently abating lead hazards at windows and maintaining painted surfaces are important preventive efforts, parents can also do their part by making sure their children are protected from lead every day. Washing children's hands often, feeding children foods high in calcium and iron, and using wet rags to clean up chips and dust from old paint (especially around windows) will all help keep lead out of growing kids' bodies. Knowing where children play, and keeping them away from chipping/peeling paint goes a long way toward keeping children safe. Residents needing more information about childhood lead poisoning are encouraged to call the Milwaukee Health Department at 225-LEAD (225-5323).

City leaders and community residents alike know that making housing lead-safe is just one part of overall neighborhood improvement. Strategic planning by community residents and City of Milwaukee staff has created a broader vision for healthy neighborhoods. As part of Lead Poisoning Prevention Awareness Week (October 20 – 26, 2002), murals painted by local children, depicting their vision for lead-safe and healthy neighborhoods, will be on display in the City Hall Rotunda.

***For more information, contact:***

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